

Los Angeles Times

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High Court to Hear Appeal of Suit Accusing Moon's Church of Fraud

By PHILIP HAGER, *Times Staff Writer*

SAN FRANCISCO—David Molko was waiting for a bus at the corner of Powell and Market streets one day in January, 1979, when he was approached by two casually attired and affable young men who said they were looking for a good coffee shop.

Molko, a 27-year-old law school graduate still uncertain about his future, conversed with the two for a while and, by his account, was invited to have dinner with a group called the Creative Community Project, which the men said liked to discuss world affairs.

What the two did not tell him, Molko now charges, is that they actually were recruiters for the Rev. Sun Myung Moon's Unification Church and were hoping to eventually entice him and other young people into the church.

At dinner, Molko says, he was talked into going to a remote encampment near Boonville, Calif., where he began to succumb to sophisticated "mind-control" techniques that deprived him of the will to leave, even after he was told 12

days later that he was among Moon followers.

He ended up recruiting and raising funds for the church and donating \$6,000 of his own before he was forcibly abducted by his parents and others and finally "deprogrammed."

Along with two other former church members, Molko filed a lawsuit against the church alleging fraud. After lower courts refused to permit the litigation, the former church members appealed to the state Supreme Court.

Case to Be Heard

The high court has agreed to consider the appeals in a case that could lead to the newly constituted court's first major ruling on the separation of church and state.

At issue is whether the recruitment techniques of a church are open to challenge in court or must be protected from judicial inquiry by the constitutional guarantees of free exercise of religion.

The case, scheduled for verbal argument Dec.

10, has emerged at the forefront of a variety of recent court actions in which church officials have been sued for millions of dollars for fraud, harassment, "clergy malpractice" and other alleged wrongdoing.

The thorny legal questions raised in the dispute have divided academics, professionals and religious organizations, fueling the debate over the activities of so-called cult groups.

Molko and his supporters argue that the church, like anyone else, can be sued for fraud and deceit. They contend that he should be allowed to prove his case by presenting expert opinion linking the church's techniques to the indoctrination methods used by the Chinese during the Korean War.

"Lying and brainwashing are not the kind of conduct the Constitution is designed to protect," said Molko's attorney, Ford Greene of San Anselmo, Calif. "If a used car dealer had sold Molko an automobile the same way the Moonies

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sold him a religion, he'd be liable for fraud straight out. There's no logical reason why they should be shielded from accountability for their conduct."

The church's lawyers and their backers counter that the plaintiffs, in effect, are asking the court to impose an unreasonable and impractical legal duty on all recruiters or missionaries to disclose their affiliation and intent to gain adherents at the outset of their contacts with others.

Allowing the suit to go forward would open the way for disenchanted former members of any faith to charge that they were "unduly influenced" into joining, participating or making contributions to a church, the attorneys say.

"This could really be devastating to many religions," said Jeffrey S. Ross, a San Francisco lawyer representing the church. "Any religious experience could end up being scrutinized in court by psychiatric experts—whether it was prayer at Yom Kippur [a Jewish holy day] or a confession at a Catholic Church."

Ross said Molko and the others freely joined the church and that if

the case ever goes to trial the church will vigorously contest the plaintiffs' version of what occurred.

A state Court of Appeal that reviewed the case last year conceded that the Unification Church's "beguiling" recruiting techniques might be objectionable. But where there was no force or threat of force, the First Amendment bars any inquiry into the "spiritual nature" of a church's hold on its members, the panel said, ordering the suit dismissed.

"If liability could be imposed in such circumstances, any disaffected adherent of a religion could bring suit alleging that he had been 'brainwashed' by the religious organization, and courts would become entangled in determining which former adherents acted out of true faith and which were subject to 'mind control,'" Appellate Justice J. Anthony Kline wrote for a unanimous three-member court.

Molko brought his suit in San Francisco Superior Court in July, 1980, seeking \$1 million in damages for alleged fraud and deceit, infliction of emotional distress and false imprisonment, an allegation that has since been dropped from the case.

Two other former church members, Tracy Leal, then 19, of Santa Clara, Calif., and Barbara Dole, then 19, of Berkeley, also brought fraud suits, charging that they too had been victimized by mind-control techniques.

In the suit, Molko does not dispute that the Unification Church represents a religion, nor does he say that criminal laws were violated or that he was physically coerced by church followers.

Instead, he claims that he was subjected to a process of subtle psychological suggestion, manipulation and isolation that impaired his ability to think for himself.

He says he was purposely kept away from the outside world at remote church camps; was required to participate in an unrelenting daily regimen of lectures, testimonials and other church activities, and was constantly accompanied by a church member, even when he went to the bathroom.

When he reacted positively to church teachings, he was praised. But when he reacted negatively, he was ostracized, he said. Any time he expressed a desire to return to

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San Francisco, he was pressured to stay and was advised that the only bus back to the city left Boonville at 3 a.m.

Later, Molko moved on to another church camp where he learned that his associates were Moon followers. Nonetheless, he stayed at the camp for another five weeks before returning to San Francisco to help raise funds and recruit new members into the church, he says. At the time he was kidnaped by his family, he believed he was under "total mind control" of the church.

Support Claims

In support of his claims, Molko sought to present testimony from Dr. Margaret Singer, a psychologist, and Dr. Samuel Benson, a psychiatrist, both experts on brain-washing and cult groups.

In a pretrial declaration, Singer said she had interviewed about 260 people who had been connected with the Unification Church and had found a striking resemblance between the techniques used by recruiters and those used on some Americans imprisoned during the Korean War, whom she had interviewed. Benson, in his declaration, said he had also noted that simi-

larity. Both Singer and Benson said that their examinations of Molko indicated that he had been made incapable of exercising his own free will and judgment by the time he had learned his recruiters were followers of Moon.

Molko currently works in a family operated business in Florida and prefers not to comment on the case, according to his attorney.

The church sought and won a summary dismissal of the suit by Superior Court Judge Stuart R. Pollak, who cited a 1977 state Court of Appeal ruling in another "brain-washing" case filed against the Unification Church by parents of young adult members.

In that case, the appeal court barred a judicial inquiry into church recruiting techniques unless there was evidence that the recruits had been rendered "gravely disabled" or unable to care for themselves because of a mental disorder.

Now that the the Molko case is before the state Supreme Court, it is being watched closely by participants in other cases raising similar issues that are pending in lower courts.

In one well-publicized case, lawyers for the Church of Scientology are appealing a \$30-million damage

award by a Los Angeles Superior Court jury to former Scientologist Larry Wollersheim, who contended that he had been defrauded and harassed by the organization and suffered "psychological manipulation" through a church practice known as auditing.

Church attorneys said a ruling by the state high court barring Molko's suit on constitutional grounds could prove conclusive in their bid to have Wollersheim's claims invalidated on constitutional grounds.

"There's a long and honorable tradition that says the state may not interfere with religious practices that might otherwise be subjected to governmental scrutiny," said Michael Lee Hertzburg of New York, the attorney for the Scientologists. "We'll be watching the Molko case with a great deal of interest."

Another case waiting in the wings that also raises the question of government intervention in religious activities is a so-called "clergy malpractice" claim in which the parents of Kenneth Nally of Tujunga are suing ministers of the Grace Community Church of Sun Valley. They say the ministers negligently counseled their son before he committed suicide. A state Court of Appeal ruled in September that the case could go to trial.

Meanwhile, the Molko case has attracted an array of "friend-of-

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the-court" briefs on both sides of the dispute.

A brief filed in behalf of several "cult awareness" groups, including one sponsored by the Jewish Federation Council of Greater Los Angeles, argues that the lower courts were wrong in protecting the intentionally fraudulent and coercive recruitment practices of the Unification Church from judicial scrutiny.

An inquiry into whether Molko and the others were incapable of holding sincere religious beliefs because their mental states were altered by fraudulent recruiting practices would not require an evaluation of the religious tenets of the church, and thus would not violate the Constitution, the brief contends.

Other Side

On the other side, a brief filed on behalf of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. and other groups backs the Unification Church, arguing that if Molko prevails, the decision would invite courts to "regulate" evangelical practices and the religious conversion process.

Another brief filed by a group of 23 sociologists, psychiatrists, religion professors and other academics and professionals from around the country contends that the "coercive persuasion" theories offered in behalf of Molko by Drs. Singer and Benson have been rejected by the scientific community and should not be admitted as evidence in court.

Only in extreme cases should a church be held liable for its religious conversion processes, the academics and professionals say.

"Had the legal standards plaintiffs advocate been applied to an emergent Christianity, the creeds by which most Americans abide might never have grown to fruition," the brief says.

Sikhs Kill 2 in India

NEW DELHI (AP)—Militant Sikh separatists murdered two Sikh brothers in Punjab state Thursday, accusing them of being police informers, the United News of India reported. The deaths raised to more than 900 the number of people killed by Sikh militants in the northern state this year.



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For something *really* scary, F544 just try the Hubbard story

By DOUGLAS TODD

THE fright created by a Stephen King horror novel can be quickly laughed off. But this highly unauthorized biography of the founder of Scientology creates a weirder-than-fiction chill that doesn't go away.

Dozens of people who once adored L. Ron Hubbard testify in the book that he attacked with cruel vengeance those who threatened him.



Hubbard had a policy that Scientology's critics "may be deprived of property or injured by any means by any Scientologist... May be tricked, sued, lied to or destroyed," the book says. (Hubbard publicly rescinded the policy in 1968, but the book says it remained in force and was carried out covertly.)

Although the book tells of physical violence against ex-Scientologists, it is mainly stories of lawsuits against critics that pervade it.

This is not a book of subtlety or high style. The material is presented almost like evidence at a trial. But, since the tales of goings-on in the upper realms of Scientology are so bizarre, it's rarely dull.

L. RON HUBBARD: Messiah or Madman? By Bent Corydon and L. Ron Hubbard, Jr. Lyle Stuart Inc. \$29.95.

Hubbard died (or, as his followers say, "discarded his body,") in California in January, 1986.

But Scientology, which the author of *New Gods in America*, Peter Rowley, described as "the largest of the new religions," is far from dead.

A massive advertising campaign recently pushed the Hubbard book that inspired Scientology, *Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health*, back on to the New York Times bestseller list. Followers who say they've become happier and more successful from Hubbard's therapy include John Travolta, Sony Bono, Priscilla Presley and jazz musician Chick Corea.

The lawsuits did not end with Hubbard's death, either. The publishers say on the dust jacket that they've endured "enormous legal and personal problems" in releasing the book. One can almost say they've been courageous.

The same goes for Bent Corydon, who rose to high rank in Scientology during 17 years of membership. As a result of the book, he says, his assistant was beaten and his wife abused with repeated obscene and threatening telephone calls. (L. Ron Hubbard Jr., named as co-author, was involved at the beginning of the book, but withdrew, Corydon says,

when "... he was offered an undisclosed amount of money by Church of Scientology representatives to settle his claim against his father's estate." But the publishers of the book held a prior contract with Hubbard Jr., and decided to retain his name, Corydon writes.)

But it is the hundred or so ex-Scientologists who connected their real names with descriptions of scandalous goings-on within Scientology who deserve the most praise for their involvement in this book.

Along with Hubbard's ex-wives, they describe a greedy, suspicious, uncontrollable man who locked toddlers in cells, masterminded break-ins, practised bigamy, surrounded himself with adoring teenyboppers, had followers put knives to the throats of those who threatened him, told countless lies about a phoney distinguished past, diverted non-profit church millions to himself, preached against drugs but pumped himself full of cocaine, hallucinogens and testosterone and once wrote: "All men shall be my slaves! All women shall succumb to my charms! All mankind shall grovel at my feet and not know why!"

You won't get far into this book before coming up with your own answer to the title's question: messiah or madman?

Douglas Todd is a Vancouver Sun reporter.

Writers contest is Hubbard's thanks to science fiction

By FRANCIS HAMIT

"I think at the end, he was a lonely old man who wanted to give something back to science fiction," Algis Budrys said reflectively. It was at the end of an hour-long conversation about the Writers of the Future Contest created by L. Ron Hubbard in 1983. Hubbard, famed as the creator of Dianetics and the Church of Scientology, had been a top science-fiction writer during the genre's golden age and had returned to the form in his last years.

Budrys is the coordinating judge of the contest, director of its workshop program, editor of an annual anthology and involved in the continued expansion of the entire program, such as parallel contests and contests in other languages. A well-known science-fiction writer in his own right, Budrys was selected for this key position because he is also a well-known teacher of writing at science-fiction conventions and place like the Clarion Workshop for science-fiction writers.

He was selected also because he is not a Scientologist. In fact, he never actually met Hubbard, although he says, "I was in the same room with him once during the 1950s."

"The contest is in no way connected to the Church of Scientology. It was Hubbard's dictate that this be confined to his persona as a writer and in no way connected with the church. Those were the conditions under which I accepted the coordinating judge's job — simply because the two things are not related, not relevant," Budrys said.

The contest confers three cash awards (\$1,000, \$750 and \$500 for first, second and third places) upon winners every quarter, as well as a grand prize (\$4,000) awarded to one of the first-place finalists annually. Only writers with very limited previous publication are eligible: no more than three published short stories or one published novelette. The first anthology has sold more than 150,000 copies, while the other two books have sold over 100,000 copies each.

Budrys has had no trouble attracting some of the top writers in the field as judges. Many of them, he said, asked for the opportunity. Gene Wolfe, Ted Sturgeon, Anne McCaffery, Fred Pohl, and Larry Niven are some of the writers who have served as contest judges.

The critical success and popularity of the first anthology led to a sharp increase in the number of entries. They came from many foreign countries including the U.S.S.R. and Israel. The most recent first-place winner is from Zimbabwe, although most winners have been from the United States and Canada.

This has led to a spinoff, a writing workshop program, said Budrys. "We take these people and pass on to them not so much skills in writing, but skills in idea

generation and the development of an idea once you have it. And skills in career management.

"This seems to be working very well and the original design, not only to find talent but to nurture it, seems to be fulfilled."

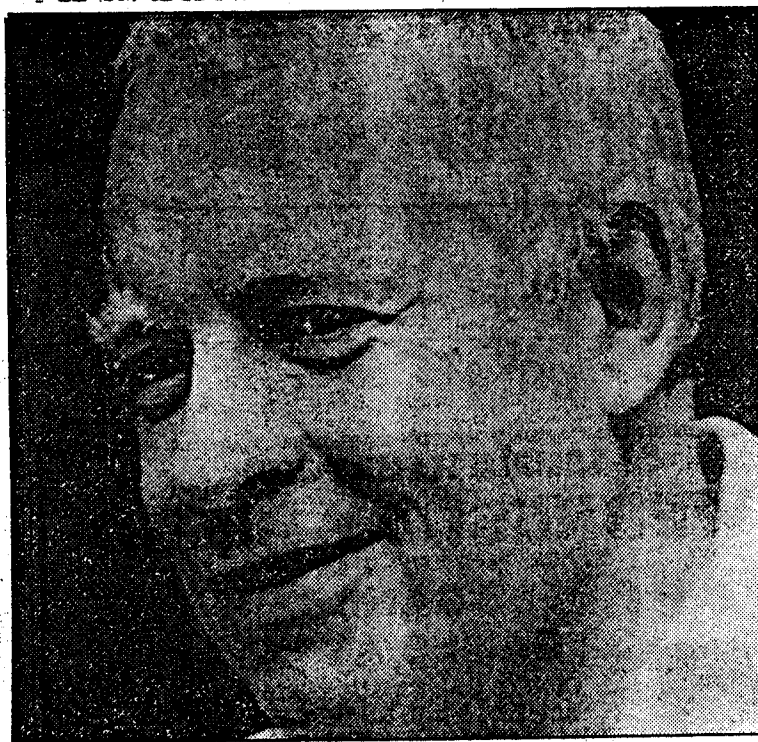
Hubbard's estate gets no royalties from WOTF but gets a "reasonable fee" for the use of his name and for his essays that are reprinted in the anthology. Each of the finalist judges gets an honorarium of \$200 and a fee of \$25 for each manuscript read. Budrys receives a fee of \$4,000 for editing the anthology and a fee as coordinating judge. He now reads every manuscript submitted, rather than relying on readers, "so that everyone has an equal chance." While he dedicates so much time to the contest that he has had to rent an apartment in Los Angeles, it is not a major portion of his income. "And there is a reason for saying that . . . I don't want anyone to think that I've been bought. I'm deliberately keeping it to a minimum, because

I'm doing it for love.

"We are doing it to pay back, because we need new writers and we are showing results. Karen Joy Fowler won the Campbell Award for best new writer of the year, as an example. Others have published novels or gotten novel contracts as a result. People are looking at our writers very hard, coming to them and asking if they have a novel. Many of them do. The other thing is that our writing workshop graduates are turning out a huge amount of work, much of which sells very quickly, and starting workshops of their own and spreading the techniques around."

From the reports of the participating writers, given at panels at science-fiction conventions, the program appears to be everything it is promised: a first-class effort to find and nurture new talent in science fiction and fantasy.

Francis Hamit is a San Fernando Valley writer with a special interest in science fiction.



Science-fiction writer and teacher Algis Budrys is coordinating judge of the Writers of the Future Contest.

Scientology president

The Board of Directors of the Church of Scientology has announced the appointment of Rev. Tom Paquette to the post of President in the United States.

With the announcement, the church also vowed to work towards stopping the spread of drug abuse.

In assuming the duties of U.S. President, Rev. Paquette becomes the national spokesman on corporate/legal matters and chief public affairs spokesman for the Los Angeles-based church.

As the church's chief U.S. spokesman, Rev. Paquette will be at the forefront of the Church of Scientology's efforts to stop drug abuse in America.

"Through the Purification Program, a highly effective detoxification and rehabilitation regimen developed by L. Ron Hubbard, Scientologists have helped hundreds of thousands of people get off drugs," he said.

For information, call (800) FOR-TRUTH.

12/25/87 Glendale News Press

Religious Groups Using Copyright Law

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years. "We're taking a bit of knowledge from corporate America to stop people from saying that they're Scientologists when they're not."

In *Religious Technology Center v. Gerbode*, C87-20627, filed last month in San Jose before U.S. District Court Judge William S. Ingram, the church is using copyright laws to try to prevent two former members from using the church's secret "technology" — techniques to gain spiritual awareness — to start their own break-off religion.

Gerbode and a related case filed in Los Angeles two years ago, *Religious Technology Center v. Wollersheim*, C85-7197MRP-BX, seem to go a step beyond many of the previous religious copyright issues, since they aim to protect the church's general theology rather than the specific names and terminology used by the church.

But a Los Angeles attorney once involved in *Gerbode* says the move to copyright scripture is based on longstanding principles.

"Mormons have certain scriptures that they tend to keep secret from the general public; so do Jews and Catholics," says Joseph A. Yanny, a name partner with the copyright firm of Herzig & Yanny. "It is not atypical to find religious organizations that lay claim to certain materials of a proprietary nature and seek to retain a protectable interest in the expression of religious ideas."

"What if you have some sort of Christian fundamentalist group that wants to oppose Church X, for example," says one Bay Area copyright lawyer, who declined to be named. "And let's say they run an ad claiming to offer 'The Truth about Church X.'"

Formerly, the attorney explains, Church X could have sued its attackers for libel. But first it would have to prove the article was false and then any discussion of damages would be based on the economic effects that the ad had on the church. To establish the economic effects, the defendant would be entitled, through discovery, to get into financial records.

"But by asserting trademark rights over its name, Church X would be able to get them to shut up without getting into discovery," he says.

But attorneys who have represented nonprofits downplay such a possibility.

"Why shouldn't a church be able to protect its good name?" asks Portland attorney Hardiman. "The public has a right not to be confused."

Ritalin Controversy

A 'Miracle Drug' Gets Closer Look

By DAVID TREADWELL,
Times Staff Writer

ATLANTA—LaVarne Parker didn't like what the pills seemed to be doing to her young son, Melvin.

But, she says, officials at his suburban Atlanta elementary school insisted that he take them if she wanted to keep him enrolled there. The doctor who had prescribed them also offered little solace. In fact, she says, he increased Melvin's dosage.

"He just kept telling me they would help him concentrate in the classroom," she said.

At home, however, the once-bubbly, bright-eyed youngster who had seldom given her any trouble was becoming hostile and suicidal.

On one especially terrifying occasion, she recounts, he suddenly jumped up from the dinner table in a cold sweat, ran to his bedroom, locked the door behind him and began banging his head against the storm-glass window.

Powerful Drug

"We had to kick in the door to get him away from the window and keep him from hurting himself," Parker recalled.

The pills in question were Ritalin, a powerful drug that has been found useful in treating hyperactive children suffering from attention deficit disorder—a medically perplexing condition marked by an inability to concentrate.

According to federal estimates, the drug is prescribed for about 4 million schoolchildren in the United States. Many educators and pediatric specialists swear by it, contending that it helps otherwise unteachable hyperactive youngsters cope with classroom demands and become productive students.

But in recent months, the oft-called "miracle drug" has become the target of a growing number of legal challenges by parents and child advocates who claim that Ritalin is being used indiscriminately as a "chemical straitjacket" for unruly schoolchildren—with physical and mental consequences that are often disastrous for the youngsters.

'Dazed Stupor'

Last month in California, for example, a Glendale mother charged in a \$7-million Superior Court suit that her 8-year-old was kept in a "dazed stupor" with Ritalin in the classroom and now suffers permanent brain damage and severe emotional distress.

The latest and potentially most far-reaching legal assault is a \$125-million class-action lawsuit filed in Atlanta federal District Court, with Parker as the lead plaintiff on her son's behalf. It accuses teachers and school administrators of pressuring parents to place their children on Ritalin.

"This drug made the plaintiffs' children very compliant and less of a problem to the teachers," the suit contends. "No other intermediary steps were taken to address the learning and behavioral problems [of the children] in school" or to determine whether the problems might stem from other sources, such as family troubles, diet defi-

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RITALIN: Closer Look at 'Miracle Drug'

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ciencies or drug or food allergies, it adds.

The suit, which names doctors, educators and the American Psychiatric Assn. but not the drug's manufacturer, also alleges that physicians have failed to warn the parents of the drug's potential side effects, which can range in severity from appetite loss and insomnia to abnormally rapid heartbeats and Tourette's syndrome, according to the manufacturer.

Tourette's syndrome is a nervous disorder in which the victim may exhibit uncontrollable facial tics, babble profanities and bark like a dog.

A spokesman for the American Psychiatric Assn. said the association was still reviewing the suit and would make no comment. One of the doctors named in Parker's suit said that neither he nor another doctor named had yet received notification of the suit, and he also declined to comment.

But George Thompson, assistant to the superintendent of the Gwinnett County school district in suburban Atlanta, which is another of the named defendants, said: "Nothing like this has ever arisen here before. What we do not do—and have not done in this case—is encourage anyone to take any specific medication. And even if we did—which we didn't—a doctor would have to prescribe it, not the school."

Works With Parents

Thompson said that the school district goes out of its way to assist hyperactive children with attention deficit disorder and to work with parents in fitting the child to a specialized educational program, if such is required.

"We really went the extra mile with Mrs. Parker," he said. "Every effort was made at every step, from the classroom teacher to the principal to the department of psychological services to provide help for the child involved. But they were denied."

"When you have a problem with a youngster and the parent does not accept the services you are capable of providing, then you reach an impasse and the school has to decide whether they're going to take the steps necessary to remove the child."

Parker says that her son, who is now 15 and was on Ritalin for more than four years, remains depressed and suicidal. She says she took him off the drug last year at her own initiative after he burst into the house from play outside one day, flailing his arms wildly and screaming frenziedly: "Get all these people off of me! They're grabbing at me! Get them off!"



ROB NELSON

Lavarne Parker of Stone Mountain, Ga., blames the drug Ritalin for mental and emotional disabilities of her son Melvin, 15.

Ritalin, the trademark name for methylphenidate hydrochloride, is a potent amphetamine that has been prescribed for almost three decades to control hyperactivity in children. It is made by the CIBA-GEIGY Pharmaceutical Co. of Summit, N.J.

Gloria Martini, a spokesman for the manufacturer, would not comment on the suit, but said that Ritalin is the "drug of choice" for treatment of hyperactive children

In adults, Ritalin acts as a cerebral stimulant but, for reasons medical authorities cannot fully explain, it has the reverse effect on many hyperactive children.

with attention deficit disorder. She said also that the company instructs doctors on the proper procedures for prescribing the medicine.

In adults, Ritalin acts as a cerebral stimulant but, for reasons medical authorities cannot fully explain, it has the reverse effect on many hyperactive children.

When properly administered, according to studies, Ritalin and other amphetamines such as Dexedrine and Cylert produce favorable results in 70% to 80% of children with hyperactivity.

"Ritalin is the recommended treatment by experts throughout the country for attention deficit disorder, much as insulin is for diabetes," said Michael K. Levine, an Atlanta physician and member of the American Academy of Pediatrics.

Levine says that many pediatricians and child psychologists across the nation fear the recent adverse publicity directed against teachers and school officials will prevent them from notifying parents when they suspect a child may have the disorder.

"Then the child will suffer because he will not be getting the help he needs," said Levine, who has practiced pediatrics for 24 years.

It has been estimated that at least 3% of the nation's 45 million preadolescent schoolchildren are afflicted with attention deficit disorder, which also has been known as minimal brain dysfunction, hyperkinetic syndrome and hyperactive child syndrome.

Boys are far more likely to have the condition than girls. It generally is characterized by excessive motor activity, short attention span and impulsive behavior. Affected children usually do poorly in school unless treated.

Many are the parents who feel that Ritalin helped their hyperactive children focus their attention and improve their academic performance.

"You could see it work," said a suburban Atlanta housewife whose son, now in college, was treated with the drug between the ages of 6 and 8. "It was just amazing." She added that he was thoroughly diagnosed before the drug was prescribed and that his condition was carefully monitored for any adverse reaction while he used it.

But critics contend that the criteria for determining hyperactivity are so broad—and that so much weight is given to reports of teachers when children are diagnosed by medical specialists—that Ritalin abuse has become rampant in schools.

Dennis Clarke, president of the Citizens Commission on Human Rights International, a nonprofit organization that monitors mental health abuses, said that in some areas of the country the situation is "out of hand" with "doctors who heavily push the drug."

"In some schools in Maryland, 80% of the kids are on it," he added.

Ritalin use has grown dramatically in recent years, with annual sales estimated at about \$75 million. Utah, Maryland and Georgia are the leading states in per capita consumption.

In Georgia, for example, the consumption rate is 1,218 grams per 100,000 population, according to Andrew Watry, executive director of the Composite State Board of Medical Examiners.

That is about double the rate in California and more than three times the rate in New York, he said.

What is more, a ZIP-code search of Ritalin shipments showed that a handful of affluent Atlanta suburbs accounted for 45% of the total sales

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Los Angeles Times

RITALIN: Movement to Closer Scrutiny

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in the state, Watry added.

That astonishing figure prompted the board to conduct a more thorough investigation, working with teachers, physicians and parents to uncover the chain of responsibility.

"What we found was that there was a general notion that this drug was a panacea for a lot of behavior problems," Watry said. "People would seem to think it was a miracle drug and would suggest it for any kid who squirmed in his seat."

He added: "I actually had a case where several parents told me of a school counselor who was pressuring them to medicate their children and when they asked him for a justification, he would say: 'We're playing the percentages.' That's playing Russian roulette with children."

Many school officials maintain that the problems with Ritalin are being blown out of proportion, but John Coale, an attorney with offices in Los Angeles and Washington who represents the plaintiffs in the Parker case as well as in similar suits in Minnesota and Maryland, sees the case much differently. He contends that a "definite disaster" is going on in American schools.

Coale, who has filed lawsuits in such mass-disaster cases as the toxic cyanide cases in Bhopal, India, and the DuPont Plaza Hotel fire in Puerto Rico, said the primary objective of the Ritalin lawsuits is to ensure that schoolchildren are not arbitrarily placed on Ritalin.

"We want the kids protected," he said. "It's a horrifying picture when you have little people in schools across this country lined up every day to take a drug—like something out of 'One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest.'"

Coale said that Ritalin is banned in Sweden and subject to stiff controls in Japan and Britain.

Parker, who founded a parents' advocacy group called CHILD—Children Having Ignored Learning

Disabilities—after her embittering lessons with her son's experience with Ritalin, said hundreds of other parents have called her with similar stories involving their children.

"They say the kids are zombies—they're nothing" she said. "You're talking about kids who are going to grow up and, some of them, not be able to put on their own pants. They're going to be a burden on society forever."

One of the most poignant calls she received was from a 26-year-old Los Angeles man who, she said, told her that his parents had him placed on Ritalin as a youngster and that he later turned to street drugs.

No Confidence

"Now, he told me, he doesn't have any confidence in himself," she said. "He can't meet girls. He wants to start up a business but doesn't know how. I thought: 'Oh, my God, is this what I have to look forward to with Melvin?'"

In a report published this year in the Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, a 10-year study of boys treated with Ritalin disclosed that 43% were arrested for felony violations before they were 18.

The report also said that continued use of Ritalin did not seem to improve the academic achievement and peer status of children. It quoted researchers as concluding that "a clinical treatment with Ritalin was found to have no beneficial effect, and there was some evidence to suggest a poor behavior outcome for the drug-treated group."

In Massachusetts, a 14-year-old boy bludgeoned a classmate to death with a baseball bat last December after withdrawing from Ritalin. His parents said the boy had been using the drug for seven years before but had been neither tested nor monitored during the entire period.

Ritalin critics call the case a classic example of psychotic behavior brought on by Ritalin and

aggravated by withdrawal from the drug after long use.

The manufacturer of Ritalin warns in its packaging materials that "chronically abusive use can lead to marked tolerance and psychic dependence with varying degrees of abnormal behavior." It also cautions that "careful supervision is required during drug withdrawal, since severe depression as well as the effects of chronic over-activity can be unmasked."

Perhaps the one bright spot in all the recent controversy over Ritalin is the closer scrutiny that prescribing of the drug is getting, says Watry, the Georgia medical board director.

"Parents are asking more questions of the teachers and doctors who may suggest medication is necessary," he said. "We're also finding that school systems are a lot more cautious about suggesting to parents that their children need to be medicated."

He added: "Ritalin is not a bad drug. If we thought the drug wasn't useful, we would have banned it. But it helps a lot of people. So we don't want to throw the baby out with the bathwater."